

COMMISSION

ACTS 9.8-18

VERSE 8-9

Here was the arrogant, driven, ambitious, “I won’t even stop for a break in the middle of the day” Saul – suddenly humbled and brought down to the lowly position of having to be led into town by his companions...

...where he sat in darkness for three days.

Saul didn’t know how long this blindness would last. I don’t think he was aware that it was three days until the third day.

I don’t know what Saul might have been thinking on those first two days.

Maybe he played over and over in his mind the events of the last several weeks – maybe reflecting on his own life all the way back to his childhood – beginning only now to realize the goading of God in his life and wondering how he could have been so blind not to have seen it.

We learn later during the verses dealing with Ananias that Jesus appeared to Saul in a vision during this time to tell him very specifically that a man named Ananias would visit him, put his hands on him, and that his sight would be restored.

Maybe that was on the second day.

But on that third day that Saul was still blind, I wonder then what went through his mind?

1. Three days

Where was the Law

Where was the Sanhedrin

Where were the Jewish customs and traditions...

...the love of which had driven Saul to such zeal for persecution.

2. Three days

- The number of days that the butler in prison with Joseph had to wait until he was restored to Pharaoh’s palace. (**Gen. 40.13**)
- The distance into the wilderness Israel was to travel to get far enough away from Egypt that they could worship the Lord (**Ex. 3.18**)
- The length of time the curse of darkness remained over the land of Egypt as God through Moses demanded of Pharaoh, “Let my people go.” (**Ex. 10.22**)
- The amount of time God gave Israel to make preparation for leaving the wilderness and cross over the Jordan River to the Promised Land. (**Josh. 1.11**)
- The amount of time Esther took to fast before confronting the king, with the message to Mordecai, “If I perish, I perish.” (**Esther 4.16**)
- The number of days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish because of his rebellion against God. (**Jonah 1.17**)
- The number of days that Jesus was in the tomb before overcoming death and the grave and showing Himself to the disciples.

The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly what Saul was thinking.

The one thing we do know that he did was to fast (**v. 9**) and to pray (**v. 11**).

Someone said, “God has no still-born children.”

It is the natural response of one born into the kingdom to desire to talk with the Father.

It is not an obligation, but a privilege that those who know Christ cannot avoid.

Just as respiration is the signal of life to the doctor and the mother, thus prayer is the evidence of a new life in Christ. It is the respiration of a living soul.

As a Pharisee of Pharisees, we can be certain that Saul had prayed on many occasions before. But now things were different.

The prayers were no longer offered as evidence of his own righteousness, but were the prayers of a broken-hearted, repentant sinner who had come face-to-face with the risen Lord.

Saul came into the kingdom in a single moment of confession, but coming into the church was a longer process.

In **verses 7-9**, Saul's companions lead him into Damascus to the home of a Jewish man named Judas (v. 11) where he will spend three days in darkness.

The only light he saw during these days was a vision of Jesus telling him about the upcoming visit from Ananias (v. 12).

Imagine that you are a Jew living in Damascus.

In the last several months, travelers from Jerusalem have come to the city with the message of the good news that the Messiah has come.

You listen to the message of His teaching and of His crucifixion and of the resurrection, and your heart is warmed by the words these messengers bring.

Soon, you, too, came to an understanding of the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. You have embraced that truth and acknowledged the lordship of Christ in your life, having followed that profession with baptism.

You, along with the other new disciples, rejoice in the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Everyone is new in the faith – no pastor, no Bible, no experience – nothing except this new experience of faith and the fellowship of other believers.

But recently, more travelers have come from Jerusalem – this time with a different story.

The church has continued to flourish in Jerusalem, but the Council – the Sanhedrin – along with conservative, orthodox Jews have begun a systematic effort to destroy this movement of “the Way.” They have even resorted to violence and execution.

The reports are that the persecution is being led by a young, zealous priest named Saul, of Tarsus.

He is a veritable unknown among the people of Damascus except for one thing – He is ruthless and determined to imprison or put to death anyone who is a disciple of Christ.

To top off the stories, you now hear that Saul, along with a deputation and authorization from the Sanhedrin, is on his way to Damascus to arrest those who confess Jesus of Nazareth as Lord.

Not only that, the news is that Saul is nearly at the gate.

I doubt if there was any thought in the minds of the believers in Damascus of meeting Saul at the gate. In fact, there may have been many who began to pack their belongings to flee the city as others had done from Jerusalem.

Others realized that, if there was ever a time to pray, this was that time. So they gathered in small groups in homes to pray about the coming days.

What do you think they might have prayed for?

How would we have prayed?

- For God to rescue them from the coming persecution?
- For God to somehow prevent Saul from ever making it to the city?
- That maybe God would even see fit to judge Saul and take him out so that he could not continue to persecute the church?

Assuming...

- that we were among those who awaited the coming of Saul of Tarsus

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- that we were among those who joined in prayer for God's intervention...

...how many of us – how many of those disciples in Damascus – would have thought to have prayed for God to answer our prayer by converting Saul on his way so that when he arrived in Damascus, he would join them in worship?

That prayer does not seem to have occurred to disciples of Damascus – not if we take the reaction of one of the leaders as evidence.

Verse 10 We meet Ananias. *(Read verses 10-12)*

- Reminiscent of the call of Samuel
- Interesting – Ananias recognized the voice of Christ
- Disciple – did not refer to him as a Christian
- Not a member of the Dispersion, but a resident of Damascus
- v. 13 “I have heard...”
- Keeper of the Law (**Acts 22.12**)
- Respected by other Jews

Jesus tells Ananias... *(Read verses 11-12)*

- Where to go
- Who to see
 - Saul of Tarsus – very specific about who it was Ananias was to see.
 - Imagine Ananias' response.
- What God was already doing –
 - Saul was praying
 - He has seen a vision
- What to expect

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- Saul is blind
- He is expecting you
- What to do and say
 - Place your hands on him that he might receive his sight

Ananias' Objection *(Read verses 13-14)*

- Almost humorous to hear Ananias tell God about who this Saul person was and about his plans.
- Heard what he has done in Jerusalem
- Papers to repeat it here in Damascus

Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God*:

When we answer the call of God on our lives, there is a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.

In order for us to be obedient, we must first respond in faith, making adjustments in our lives where necessary.

It is obvious at this point in the story that Ananias faced a “crisis of belief.”

In our Bible study this week, the question came up about why Ananias would object.

He didn't just get some feeling about going down to Judas' house. Jesus actually spoke to him. He heard the same voice that Saul had heard on the road to Damascus.

So why would he object and say things to Jesus that apparently Jesus already knew about?

Yet Ananias is not the first to make excuses when confronted directly by God.

- Adam
- Moses at the burning bush
- Israel at Mt. Sinai
- Jonah
- Jeremiah

Ananias's Obedience

- **Verses 15-16** God said, "Go..."
 - He is a chosen vessel – God chose him
 - He is my messenger to the nations and to kings and to the Jews
 - He will suffer greatly for My name's sake
- **Verse 17** Ananias went...

17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and *stood before Saul*, laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit...*Brother Saul, receive your sight.*"

18 Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once.

Then Saul looked up at Ananias and Ananias said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.

Jesus has this message for you:

I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, (for you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard) to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

Ananias then said to Saul, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Verse 18 ...And he arose and was baptized.

Several points to make in conclusion:

1. It is interesting to note that God took more space in the story to tell how He brought Saul to an understanding of God's plan and where Saul fit into it than He did on Saul's conversion.

We tend to put the emphasis of Christianity on the experience of salvation. God puts the emphasis on the process of sanctification.

2. It is also interesting that Luke did not spend any time on or make any commentary concerning Saul's receiving of the Holy Spirit. If there was an issue of a "second blessing," here would have been a great place to have included it.

Sometimes, silence is also a great teacher.

3. Saul did not just see the light on the road to Damascus. Following the events in Damascus at the home of Judas, Saul became a light that God would direct to shine to the ends of the earth.

Read John 14.21, 23